The Office Building Link

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Facilities Find Savings and Green in Waterless Urinals

By Robert Kravitz

Today's building owners and managers are experiencing some unique pressures. Always interested in finding ways to cut costs as well as attract and retain tenants, they are now looking to operate their facilities in a more environmentally preferable manner. Green is no longer just "in," it is how more and more owners/managers believe they must operate their facilities in order to meet tenant demands and compete in the marketplace.

Not only are Greener facilities healthier to work in and have less environmental impact, they also make good business sense. Studies indicate that Green cleaning systems and incorporating the use of other environmentally preferable products and services can actually *lower* operating costs. Furthermore, studies also indicate that certain Green high-rise office structures in New York City command rents as much as ten percent higher than comparable office space in non-Green buildings.

Restrooms, in particular, are receiving the most attention and scrutiny. As owners/managers look for new ways to cut costs, while protecting the environment, restroom areas are providing ample opportunities to reduce waste. Already, most facilities have sensor-controlled, low-flow toilets, sinks, and urinals as well as automatic dispensing systems for paper and soap to help regulate usage. But, many are now considering the installation of waterless or no-flush urinals as another way to cut costs, reduce water usage, be Greener, and secure an additional benefit – to help maintain their restrooms.

Waterless urinals allow gravity to drain urine into a vertically designed trap/cylinder, which is filled with a thin layer of liquid sealant that sits in the drain area of the urinal. As urine passes through the trap/cylinder and sealant, which also blocks and prevents odors from being released into the air, it eventually overflows into a conventional drainpipe, similar to a traditional urinal.

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Cutting Costs

Usually, the first savings owners/managers realize when transferring to waterless urinals is how much less expensive they are to install. This is because there are fewer installation requirements.

As the name implies, waterless urinals do not use water. As a result, none of the normal plumbing paraphernalia – water hook-ups, flush handles, and sensory devices – is required. Although waterless urinals do require plumbing for drainage, this is a relative minor part of the installation charge.

But another way waterless urinals save money may not be as obvious. The cost of pumping water to and through a facility can be expensive. This cost is initially paid by local water departments, but ultimately, building owners, renters, and taxpayers must foot the bill. In the U.S., it is estimated that it can cost anywhere from $0.80 to $2.00 per gallon of water to be delivered to a facility, used, and then drained away.

Reduce Water Usage

Reducing water usage and incorporating Greener operating procedures go hand-in-hand. Most building owners/managers are very surprised when they find out how much water a urinal uses during the course of a year. Depending on the type of facility, the number of males using the facility, and other factors, the amount of usage can be staggering:

- In an office with one urinal and 25 male workers, one urinal may use more than 50,000 gallons of water per year.
- A restaurant with three urinals and an average of 150 male customers per day will use at least 72,000 gallons of water annually.
- An educational facility with 10 urinals and 300 male students can use as much as 330,000 gallons of water *per school year* – approximately 185 days.

Finding ways to more efficiently conserve water use is not only Greener and environmentally preferable, but for facilities seeking Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification, it is almost mandatory. The LEED rating system offers up to five points (out of approximately 32 required) toward certification for buildings that incorporate measures to reduce water usage. Installing waterless urinals is often one of the easiest and most significant ways to accomplish this.

Cleaning and Maintenance

Additionally, most waterless urinals are designed with a highly-finished surface. Because urine is softer than water and less likely to adhere to surfaces, few if any stains, spots or soiling are left on the surface. This means less scrubbing – and fewer chemicals –

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is normally required to clean waterless urinals.

In most cases, all that is needed to wipe these urinals clean is a mist of a mild, properly diluted cleaner or disinfectant onto either the surface of the urinal or a cleaning cloth. Some manufacturers require cleaning chemicals specially designed for cleaning waterless urinals. These products help protect the trap/filter, while providing adequate pH levels and chemical ingredients to properly clean the urinal.

Many experts also believe that waterless urinals are “healthier” than conventional urinals. Studies continue to indicate that many people, especially men, do not wash their hands after using the restroom. Because the surface of the urinal stays dry, there is less likelihood for germs and bacteria to develop. Additionally, because the urinal does not need to be touched, there is less likelihood of cross-contamination.

Benefits Depend on Due Diligence

Although there are several benefits to waterless urinals, building owners/managers must do their homework and investigate the different types of no-flush urinals on today’s market – for they do vary.

For instance, the trap/cylinder inserts on some models can require more frequent replacement than others. Depending on the model or manufacturer, these inserts can cost from $6 to as much as $50 each. A costly insert on a waterless urinal, which must be frequently changed, can quickly wipe out and hoped-for savings.

Additionally, maintaining and replacing the trap/cylinders can vary on different no-water urinals. On some models, this is a very quick and easy procedure, taking a few minutes at most. On others, it can be time-consuming and a rather messy job.

Greener Future

Advanced technologies in restroom fixtures are now being recognized for the benefits they offer in helping facilities operate in a more environmentally preferable manner. In many facilities, it is as important and beneficial as Green cleaning, improved indoor air quality, having energy-efficient HVAC systems, and similar issues.

And, some believe procedures, products, and restroom fixtures that can help monitor and control water use will play an even greater environmental role in the future. Instead of waiting for new technologies to help meet this challenge, the technology is already here today when it comes to waterless urinals.

For more information on Waterless urinals, visit http://www.waterless.com/ or call 888-663-5874.

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